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SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR: SECOND ROUND OF ELECTIONS TOPS  
FIRST ROUND IN TURNOUT

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2946  
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2746  
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2742  
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2378  
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[1](#)I. NEW DELHI 2109  
[1](#)J. NEW DELHI 1799  
[1](#)K. NEW DELHI 1684

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius, Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: For the second time in less than a week, Jammu and Kashmir voters went to the polls in larger than expected numbers on November 23 in the second phase of elections for the state legislature. The voter turnout was estimated at 65 percent for the six seats contested. Each contest, including the two seats in the Kashmir valley, showed significant improvement in voter turnout over 2002 levels. The second round, like the first round, was largely free of violence and coercion. Women's participation was high. The high turnout two rounds in the valley are seen by analysts as a repudiation of the separatist leaders but not a rejection of the separatist sentiment which remains strong. The GOI hopes that if it can put together several rounds of high turnout and violence-free elections in the state, it will help offset the public relations damage from the low turnout it expects in Srinagar on December 24, the last day of the seven-phase election cycle in Kashmir. End Summary.

Better Than Last Week, Better Than 2002  
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[1](#)2. (U) Voter turnout in the November 23 second round of the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly elections was higher than in the first round (Ref A), higher than in the 2002 polls, and far higher than most political pundits had expected as recently as a week ago. Of the six seats contested in this round, two were in the Kashmir valley and four in the Jammu region. Ten constituencies went to the polls on November 17 (Ref A). The remaining 71 contests will be held in five additional phases over the next four weeks. Results will be declared for all seats shortly after counting on December 28.

[1](#)3. (SBU) While final tallies are still not in, the state's chief electoral officer announced on November 23 after the polls had closed a tentative turnout number of 65 percent in the six constituencies combined. The number is expected to move up as results come in from several polling stations that had not reported. Eighty one candidates from 14 parties vied for the votes of an electorate of 489,000 in the six assembly seats.

¶4. (SBU) The turnout was higher than in 2002 in each of the six election districts that went to the polls. Turnout in the two contests in the valley -- Ganderbal (51 percent) and Kangan (60 percent) -- was significantly higher than in 2002. The Ganderbal constituency was particularly closely watched by political analysts. Many expected the election boycott call of the separatists to carry weight in Ganderbal because it adjoins Srinagar, where the separatist sentiment is strongest and where turnout in 2002 was in the single digits. The constituency was also in focus because it is the traditional family seat of Kashmir's most prominent political family, the Abdullahs. The National Conference's Omar Abdullah is once again contesting this seat after having lost in 2002.

#### Free of Violence, Fear, Coercion

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¶5. (SBU) Like the first round on November 17 (Ref A), the second round was generally free of violence in the areas going to the polls. There were scattered clashes between security forces and protesters in Baramulla district, with reported injuries to 30 protesters and 10 security personnel.

The crowds in Baramulla were protesting the death of two people on Saturday when a panicked personal security guard for one candidate opened fire on a crowd protesting the elections. There were two reports of grenades being thrown at homes of candidates without damage to life or property. There were reports of minor clashes between supporters of opposing candidates at three polling booths in the Jammu

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region.

¶6. (SBU) As in the first round, there was no report of security forces coercing the population to vote. Security was tight in the six districts that went to the polls. Srinagar was completely cordoned in and shut down by security forces to prevent protesters from going to the Ganderbal district. There were one report of underage and ineligible migrant workers casting votes but there was no indication that this happened on any significant scale.

#### Why Kashmiris are not Heeding Boycott Call

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¶7. (SBU) As they watch the higher than expected voter participation in the valley, there appears to be growing agreement between political analysts that Kashmiri voters, while they retain their grievances against the Indian state, want to elect a government of their own because they believe it will be responsive to their demands for water, electricity, roads, and other government services. MEA Joint Secretary T.C.A. Raghavan told Political Counselor that the high turnout demonstrates how badly the people of Kashmir want a return to normalcy.

¶8. (C) Izhar Wani of the AFP summarized to Poloff a composite of the views of the electorate from his conversations with voters on November 23: "We want Delhi rule to end and our own people to run the government in the state. When the civilian government was in charge, there were no killing of innocent people by the police. It was only after Governor's rule was imposed in the summer that the security forces started shooting at people. Resolution of the Kashmir issue and day-to-day administration are two different matters. There will always be a place for mainstream political parties here."

¶9. (C) Saleem Pandit of the Times of India told Poloff: "It is a defeat for the separatist All Party Hurriyat Conference. Voters tell me they want water, electricity, and roads. They tell me they want jobs. They are fed up with all the calls for marches by the Hurriyat leaders. Women are coming out to vote in large numbers. They are especially driven by

these issues."

¶10. (C) Khursheed Wani of the Pioneer told Poloff: "By the high turnout Delhi should not think that the separatist sentiments has dissipated. If the new government takes any decision similar to the Amarnath Shrine Board land use decision, the valley will see another eruption of anger. Voter turnout should not be taken as a signal that the relationship with Delhi has changed."

#### First Signs of Public Campaigning

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¶11. (SBU) A distinguishing feature of the Jammu and Kashmir election until the first round was that it had been completely devoid of public campaigning. The high turnout in the first round gave the mainstream parties and candidates encouragement to venture further. In the one week between the first two rounds, there were a handful of public rallies that took place in the valley and other signs of traditional Indian electioneering - posters, placards, fliers, loudspeaker - began to surface. The high turnout will further embolden the candidates to engage in the campaigning practices used in the past.

#### Comment: On to the Next Round

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¶12. (C) The good news continues for the GOI with high turnout twice in a row. The third round of the rolling Jammu and Kashmir elections will take place on November 30 in five constituencies, all of which are in the valley. Pandit of the Times of India and Khursheed of the Pioneer said the district to watch in the third round on November 30 is Kupwara, where separatist predicted that the turnout in 2002 was low. Both predicted that turnout will be high in Kupwara. The GOI is hoping that these successive rounds of high turnout over several weeks help offset the public relations damage they expect from a poor turnout on December 24 in Srinagar, which goes to the polls last.

¶13. (U) Tentative turnout numbers in Phase II:

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Region	District	--- Voter Turnout (%) --- 2008	2002
Valley:	Kangan	60	52
	Ganderbal	51	35
Jammu:	Nowshera	70	58
	Darhal	73	47
	Rajouri	67	27
	Kalakote	73	49

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